



THE VOCATION OF BEING A PHARMACIST



The Mayor presenting the Gharfien il-Hila award to Simone Fenech on Qormi day

Marika Azzopardi interviews pharmacist **SIMONE FENECH** who was recently presented with an award by the Qormi Local Council.

WHEN DID YOUR CAREER AS A PHARMACIST BEGIN?

I graduated in December 1982 and over the years worked in varied pharmacies. Today I work at Pinto Pharmacy in Qormi which is now a family-run business.

IS THIS A VERY OLD PHARMACY?

Indeed it is. The name is directly connected with the history of Qormi and Grandmaster Pinto. It is a very old pharmacy which was run by a veteran chemist. Our son bought it



On the graduation day with my sister Germaine, 11 Dec 1982

recently and we worked in it, in its old state, for a while. This was up until we relocated to small premises close by whilst the building underwent intensive restoration works. These will be ready soon and, once it is inaugurated, we will start operating from within it again.

CAN YOU SHARE WITH THE SYNAPSE READERS SOME INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR AWARD?

This came as a complete surprise. I received an invitation in the post, whereby I was invited to attend a ceremony at the Local Council. I must admit that initially I did not intend to attend, due to the fact that we work long hours at the pharmacy; I try to avoid attending events after hours whenever possible. But then, at the last minute, I decided to attend. And sure enough, during the ceremony, my name was called and I was presented with the award dedicated to 'Gharfien il-Hila - Servizz lill-Komunita.' Basically the Local Council felt I deserved appreciation for my work with clients who come to our pharmacy and for my ability to serve them well. I decided to dedicate this award to the memory of my late father, Pio Sciriha, who was a highly talented maths and physics teacher. He taught many people who would otherwise have floundered in these topics, including myself. He had a gift of teaching such complex subjects most effectively. Above all, he taught me respect, discipline and how to take a serious approach to responsibility.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY MADE YOU STAND OUT AND BE ELIGIBLE FOR THIS AWARD?

I must make it clear that I was absolutely in the dark about all of this. But from what I gather, people feel I am a helpful person. To be honest I love to work with a passion, and when



On the wedding day with my husband George, 5 February 1984

I am speaking to a client, I do my best to dedicate my full attention to his or her questions and health problems. I like to listen well, and try to give samples where possible to help people who need to try out a product before they actually purchase a probably costly full-size, that might not be helpful to their particular case after all.

HOW HAVE PEOPLE CHANGED IN THEIR ATTITUDE TO PHARMACISTS OVER THE YEARS?

A great deal. There was a time when a pharmacist was a highly respected professional in all senses - remember that in the past we used to prepare tinctures, medicines and potions ourselves. Sometimes I still mix medicines for clients but very rarely indeed. Nowadays, clients tend to be disrespectful, behave as if they are speaking to a glorified salesgirl. They will insist on being given certain products without a prescription, even when you explain these can be dangerous and must be prescribed by a doctor.

WHAT ARE THE MAJOR PROBLEMS YOU FACE IN SUCH INSTANCES?

Clients who want to be given an antibiotic or a steroid cream, 'like the one used last year'. Elderly patients tend to be the most challenging. On the other hand, in general, clients tend to be better informed. They listen to radio or TV programmes with great attention and will come back to me to ask more information about something that interests them.



My sons, Francis and Sean



The graduation day of my son Sean, together with my late father Pio Sciriha, to whom I dedicate my Gharfien il-Hila award, 2010.

ARE THERE ANY HEALTH ISSUES WHICH YOU ARE AMAZED TO STILL SEE OR WHICH YOU HAVE SEEN ON CLIENTS RESURFACE AFTER MANY YEARS?

Oh yes ... STDs are definitely on the rise. Recently I was amazed to see a case of scabies, something we only associated with deprived conditions of wartime.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY ARE RISKS OF THE JOB WHICH YOU MUST WATCH OUT FOR?

Working in a busy pharmacy such as Pinto Pharmacy brings us face-to-face with episodes of blatant theft. We have to be quick and efficient, yet careful at the same time, especially when the pharmacy is full of clients, each demanding attention. Then there is contagion - people with bad bouts of flu come to the pharmacy as the first resort to help themselves get better. Still, we know these are our risks of the job, so to say, and we learn to protect ourselves as best we can.

IF YOU HAD TO DO IT ALL AGAIN, WOULD YOU STILL BECOME A PHARMACIST?

Most definitely. I love what I do, I love my job. I am at the pharmacy everyday at 6am, doing the paperwork, re-stocking shelves, preparing for the moment we open our doors to welcome clients. I cannot envisage a day in my life when I am not at the pharmacy anymore. ❄️

I READ THE SYNAPSE BECAUSE...

For the past 21 years it has been a source of information updating me on the latest medical news and educating each and every one of us on so many fields of science. Over the years, the journal has acquired a permanent and prominent position in my library. The minute I receive it, I read it from cover to cover. When the front cover image shows a historic location or building, I like to make time to go and visit it. My heartfelt compliments go to the managing editor, Dr Ian Ellul, for his sterling work.

